I: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

The Aka speak a Mangbetu dialect. Costermans (1937), who agrees with Putnam that the original Pygmy language has disappeared, even in the heart of the forest, states that everywhere the Pygmies use the language of the village population with which they live in symbiosis, though they retain their own accent. The Mamvu-Lese group, he says, are no exception to this rule. 193 174

Most Mbuti are polyglots, though Schebesta claims that the archers among whom he worked spoke only Efe, a fact that he takes to be additional evidence of the Pygmaean origin of this tongue, despite its obvious connection with KiLese. The Epulu Mbuti speak KiBira, KiLese, and KiNgwana. KiBira is used mainly as the camp language but in a dialectal form rendering it almost unintelligible to the Bira villagers. Whatever language the Mbuti are speaking there are certain similarities about the form it assumes, noticeably in the use of a hiatus (the "faucal gasp" noticed by Johnston, 1902, 1904, 532; see also Costermans, 1937) and of a curious singsong intonation. But for the present the question of originality in Mbuti language is still open, and we can state with certainty only that the Ituri Pygmies speak dialectal forms of the same Sudanic and semi-Bantu languages spoken by their village neighbors. 19 •

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In Turnbull B-8 (1961-1968) 1985 PO4 Pygmies PO4
Mbuti

"to call the bees" (in the sense of attracting their attention, not of summoning them). The belief is that these whistles will halt the game or the bees, so that they may be found more easily.

All such whistling, whether by lip or by *piki*, is done by men. Women rarely whistle, though they may do so to the same end as the men. If they do, it is considered all the more *mota*.

It could easily be explained by the Mbuti that the sound itself paralyzes the animals or the bees, and has this direct effect (and could so be more properly called magical), but they deny this strongly and say that the forest hears the *piki* and leads them to the bees or the game (or alternatively that the forest holds the bees and the game still for its children to find them).

In ordinary conversation, sounds are widely used to convey different ideas, a snap of the fingers indicating that the action being described was done suddenly, a high-pitched, drawn-out exhalation indicating it was done slowly. Wherever possible, the narrative is illustrated by imitations of the sound of the action described. Vowel sounds, unformed into words, are used in conversation similarly to heighten ideas, convey added emotion, to supply an element that would otherwise be missing and which is plainly of great importance to the Mbuti. For the forest is nearly always full of sound, and the Mbuti refer to this constant background by saying "the forest is talking" (*ndura a lufu*). The Mbuti listen, and interpret, and make use of what they hear. If the forest stops "talking," then it is a sign that something is very wrong and alerts the Mbuti to imminent danger.

It is not surprising, then, that sound so carefully controlled as song should be considered as *mota nengo, mota nghokbokbei*, the "strongest" possible kind of sound, activated by the breath that is so mysteriously connected with *pepo*. Song is used to communicate with the forest, and it is significant that the emphasis is on the actual sound, not on the words. Frequently the mere vowel sounds are used, sometimes imitative of animals, birds or bees but more often simply to suit the melodic line of the song. When words are used they are most often trivial, and may be spontaneous and highly sketchy references to one or another event of the day. That the song is directed at the forest, and intended to awaken the forest, is most clearly seen in the *molimo* festivals, which are the Mbuti reaction to crisis. The *molimo* is named for the festival, for the society that performs the festival, and for the central and solitary piece of paraphernalia, the trumpet that echoes the song of the Mbuti on into the depths of the forest.